

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3100

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJ: LESE MAJESTE

SUMMARY. TWO RECENT CASES OF LESE MAJESTE INVOLVING LEFTIST STUDENTS MAY SIGNAL MORE VIGOROUS ATTEMPT BY LEFTIST ELEMENTS TO UNDERMINE THE POSITION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY. END SUMMARY.

1. TWO LEFTIST STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AT CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY ON CHARGES OF LESE MAJESTE. ONE WAS CAUGHT ON FEBRUARY 6 WRITING A REMARK CRITICAL OF THE KING ON A WALL AT THE UNIVERSITY'S CENTRAL HALL WHERE THE KING WAS SCHEDULED TO PRESENT DIPLOMAS ON FEBRUARY 7. THE OTHER WAS ARRESTED ON FEBRUARY 8 FOR PUTTING UP POSTERS THREATENING THE KING (ONE READ, "PHUMIPIJOM, WHEN WILL YOU DIE?") THE KING AND QUEEN ABRUPTLY CANCELLED PLANS TO ATTEND AN INFORMAL GRADUATION PARTY ON CAMPUS (THEY ATTENDED A SIMILAR PARTY LAST YEAR). ON FEBRUARY 9 APPROXIMATELY 1000 CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND TOWNPEOPLE GATHERED AT CHIANG MAI'S MAIN POLICE STATION DEMANDING PUNISHMENT FOR THE ARRESTED STUDENT, AND, ACCORDING TO THE FEBRUARY 11 BANGKOK POST, ASKED THE POLICE TO RELEASE HIM "SO THAT THEY COULD ATTACK HIM." (CONSUL
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CHIANG MAI REPORTS THAT LEAFLETS PASSED OUT AT DEMON-

STRACTION SUGGEST NAWAPHON INVOLVEMENT.) THE CROWD CLAIMED THE STUDENT WAS A MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND. ON THE EVENING OF FEBRUARY 10, A CROWD OF ABOUT 2000 INCLUDING SOME POLITICIANS GATHERED AT THE SPORTS ARENA TO MAKE SIMILAR DEMANDS. THE POLITICIANS USED THE OCCASION TO ATTACK THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

2. ON FEBRUARY 3, TWO MEN WERE SENTENCED TO JAIL BY THE BANGKOK MILITARY COURT ON SEVERAL CHARGES OF LESE MAJESTE. ONE, A LEFTIST COLLEGE STUDENT NAMED SENI SUNGNAT, WROTE A COLUMN IN APRIL 1975 FOR THE THAI LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER DAO SIAM WHICH CRITICISED A SPEECH DELIVERED AT A POLICE ACADEMY GRADUATION CEREMONY BY THE QUEEN. AFTER HIS ARREST FOR THE OFFENSE, HE DISTRIBUTED LEAFLETS ACCUSING THE KING AND QUEEN OF CAUSING THE BLOODSHED IN THE UPRISING OF OCTOBER 1973. HE WAS SENTENCED TO 3 YEARS IN PRISON. THE EDITOR OF DAO SIAM AT THAT TIME WAS SENTENCED AS WELL TO 14 MONTHS IN PRISON, (UNDER THAI LAW, AND EDITOR IS LIABLE FOR ANYTHING PRINTED IN HIS PUBLICATION). A SIMILAR CASE WHICH OCCURRED IN OCTOBER 1974, CONCERNED AN ALLEGEDLY CRITICAL POEM PUBLISHED IN A LEFTIST MAGAZINE. THE EDITORY, A LEFTIST STUDENT, WAS CHARGED WITH LESE MAJESTE, BUT WAS LATER ACQUITTED.

3. CASES OF LESE MAJESTE ARE NORMALLY RARE IN THAILAND. THE KING AND QUEEN ARE ALMOST UNIVERSALLY RESPECTED AND REVRED BY THE THAI, AND THOSE FEW THAT WOULD CRITICIZE THEM PUBLICLY RISK NOT ONLY LEGAL SANCTION, BUT SOCIAL REBUKE AS WELL. EVEN THE COMMUNIST PARTY REFRAINS FROM ATTACKING HIS MAJESTY PUBLICLY, FOR FEAR OF ADVERSE REACTION WHICH WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY RESULT. HOWEVER, THERE ARE LEFTIST ELEMENTS WHICH WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO UNDERMINE THE POSITION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY, AS THEY VIEW THE KING AS A TREMENDOUS OBSTACLE TO THEIR AIMS. THE ABOVE MENTIONED CASES MAY MERELY BE ISOLATED AND RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT. BUT IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THESE OCCURRENCES RESULT FROM A NEW BOLDNESS ON THE PART OF LEFTISTS, AND ARE A SERIOUS ATTEMPT TO POLITICIZE THE POSITION OF THE KING. ANY PUBLIC DISCUSSION
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OF THE ROYAL FAMILY'S ROLE IN POLITICS HAS THIS EFFECT, AND WHILE A FEW CASES OF LESE MAJESTE WILL HAVE LITTLE IMMEDIATE EFFECT ON THE POSITION OF THE KING, IN THE LONG RUN THEY MAY BEGIN TO HAVE A MORE SERIOUS EFFECT.
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